

CONCLUSION

Washington must decide now how its higher education system should evolve in the coming decade and beyond. State leaders must determine the investment they are prepared to make on behalf of the taxpayers, and the returns on investment that should be expected. But before those questions can be addressed, we must decide what kind of state we want to live in and whether we are willing to make the commitment to turn that vision into reality.

The Higher Education Coordinating Board believes we want these things for our state, our college and university system, and our students. We want to live in a state where:

- The economy is vibrant, flexible, and resilient, businesses clamor for our graduates, and students know there will be a place for their skills and abilities once they finish college;
- Students who study hard and learn well in the K-12 system have the opportunity to go to college without worrying about whether there will be enough room for them;
- Every K-12 graduate is fully prepared for education or work after high school;
- Adequate financial aid for deserving college students is considered a priority, not a luxury;
- Students who can't go away to college are able to realize their dreams closer to home;
- The needs of "non-traditional" students are met by programs and colleges and universities that understand many of them don't want or need a traditional degree; and
- Diversity is a reality, not just a goal.

All of the challenges facing higher education in Washington – and every element of the "vision" described above and elsewhere in this document – first and foremost affect students. The students of today and tomorrow are at the heart of the need for increased funding and greater accountability. More money to address growing demand and greater accountability will enable us to improve the quality of their instruction, to help them reach their goals in a timely manner, and to maintain a commitment to access and affordability.

The road ahead for higher education offers only one viable option: sharing responsibility and committing ourselves to action now – before today's challenges become tomorrow's crises.



Higher education is an investment – a long-term investment that requires long-term commitment to produce even longer-lasting benefits. The sooner we act, the greater the rate of improvement we can achieve and the more likely we are to create the state we envision.

Data, expertise, and experience tell us the steps we need to take to realize that vision. Adequate funding and a high-quality, efficient, and accountable higher education system are the tools. Whether we invest in those tools – and how we use them to build our future

– is up to each of us and all of us.